

# LOGGING & LOCAL ROADS:

## AT A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY INTERSECTION

The harvest and extraction of natural resources – including timber – is important to the health of Michigan’s economy. And it generally occurs alongside a county’s local roads, unpaved or paved, rather than along the freeway.

Unfortunately, Michigan road funding has lagged for a decade or more, meaning these low-traffic roads are extremely susceptible to weather events (rain, freeze/thaw cycles). Many culverts and bridges are in questionable condition. In fact, only 18 percent of Michigan’s federal aid roads are in “good” condition.<sup>1</sup>

Roads not eligible for federal dollars are usually in worse shape. Compounding the situation, virtually all county road agencies have about 40 percent less staff than they had 10 to 15 years ago.

County road agencies are charged by statute and case law with maintaining a safe and efficient road system from the centerline to the edges of the right-of-way. It’s challenging to keep the roads accessible for logging *and* ensure safe surface conditions for the travelling public.

But by communicating, cooperating and planning for the future together, it can be done.

<sup>1</sup> 2016 Annual Report of the Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council, released May 2017.

### Future Directions for Logging and Local Roads

After months of discussion by the leadership of the County Road Association (CRA) of Michigan, which represents all 83 county road agencies, and the state’s three logging and timber hauling associations, a platform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is being hammered out. It includes the following eight proposed “best practices” between county road agencies and the logging industry:

- **48-hour advance notice for implementing seasonal weight restrictions** by county road agencies to known loggers or haulers working in the area. This allows loggers to move equipment, alter harvest schedules and generally avoid business disruption when the weather makes roads vulnerable to damage from fully-loaded trucks.
- **48-hour advance notice before harvest begins by state, the hauler or private landowners**, or other timber harvest representative, to the local county road agency. This allows road engineers and experts to assess road condition, recommend best access points and best haul

routes. County road agencies will extend every effort to accommodate the timber industry while protecting the road system for the driving public.

- **Improved long-term planning with Michigan Department of Natural Resources and private sector timber industry**, to identify timeframes and locations for large-scale future harvests. When logging associations involve county road agencies in long-term harvest planning, road agencies can better target Transportation Economic Development Funds – Category E, called Forest Road Funds (if any), to strengthen the roads that will be impacted.
- **The state's three timber associations and the County Road Association of Michigan will seek an increase to TEDF-E** that will accommodate the \$ 6 billion expansion that is the goal of the state's logging economy. For the last 27 years, the fund has not been indexed to inflation or the growth of the timber industry. TEDF-E is performing as intended to strengthen the local road network for Michigan's timber/logging industries, but additional revenue from the state (DNR) can only improve our gravel/sand road needs.
- **Simplification in permitting**, as CRA completes revision of its Work in the Right-of-Way Permit; and makes progress in getting all 83 county road agencies to adopt standardized permits with fees reflective of true administrative costs or statewide averages for road agencies of comparable size and scope. To date, all nine CRA District Councils have voted to endorse the standardized permits that were updated in 2016-2017 by legal counsel and county road engineers to reflect current state law.
- **Standardized online permitting technology**, allowing truckers to obtain transportation permits from a single cloud-based platform that may include e-pay, e-signature, e-permits and other customer-ease features. A pilot test of such a system by three county road agencies is underway.
- **Improved communication when conflicts occur**. The CRA and the Michigan Association of Timberman (MAT) have agreed to alert the MAT president and the CRA executive director when word of a logging-related conflict is received out on the local roads. Each county road agency will be encouraged to speak to the logging entity before referring it to CRA. It is the hope of both organizations to resolve problems between the parties, rather than elevating them to the legislative arena repeatedly.
- **Communication and training opportunities** benefitting both sectors that may include participation as suggested by the MDNR director in Forest Sustainability Training; possible inclusion in the Great Lakes Timber Professionals educational programming; and other opportunities.

In addition to these best practices, the timber industry and county road agencies will continue to discuss and refine process improvements that may be acceptable to both sides including:

- **Identifying terms for uniform bonding and permitting** during seasonal weight restrictions with consideration for the special surfaces on seasonal roads, sand roads, gravel roads and roads with no residents during the weight restrictions timeframe.
- **Considering** that if there is agreement to liberalize hauling on some of these types of roads named above, **finest should be fully enforced during the seasonal weight restrictions** timeframe for haulers who violate these carefully expanded permissions.
- **Look at liability immunity language** for the timber industry when working in the right of way and properly utilizing signage.

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## COUNTY ROAD AGENCY FUNDING INFORMATION

# Forest Road Funds

This Guidance Document defines and describes Michigan Forest Road Funds, Transportation Economic Development Fund Category E (TEDF-E), a legislative established economic development tool, administered by the Michigan Department of Transportation.



### Category E

Transportation Economic Development Fund Category E (TEDF-E) was established by the Legislature with strong support from Michigan's timber industry to assist county road agencies working on transportation projects that increase access to forest resources. Projects are to be developed for timber resources harvestable over the next five years. TEDF-E may also be used to increase the safety and efficiency of transport of forest raw materials.

### Counties eligible for Category E funds

47 county road agencies are eligible to receive funding, which is determined by A) a national lakeshore or national park being located in that county, or B) 34 percent or more of the county being commercial forest land.

### Projects eligible to receive Category E funds

Category E funds may be used for construction projects, with no match, so long as:

- The project is for road construction or reconstruction;
- Located in an eligible county; and
- Directly related to the collection and transport of forest raw products.

### Disbursement of funds

Funds are automatically disbursed to eligible counties once a year in October, at the start of the state fiscal year.

***For more on TEDF-E, visit [tinyurl.com/TEDFE](http://tinyurl.com/TEDFE), or contact MDOT's Office of Economic Development, 517.335.1069.***

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